

# MENTAL WELLNESS AND PSYCHO-SOCIAL SUPPORT

**A Field Guide Produced by  
the Centre for the Study  
of Violence and  
Reconciliation**



**GIJTR**

Global Initiative for Justice  
Truth & Reconciliation



Founded in 1989, the **Centre for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation (CSVr)** aims to understand and prevent root causes of violence in all its forms and address its consequences in order to build sustainable peace and reconciliation in South Africa and across the African continent. CSVr's work addresses a wide range of forms of violence and conflict – past and present – including criminal, political, collective, and domestic and gender violence, as well as violence against children.  
[www.csvr.org.za](http://www.csvr.org.za)



International Coalition of  
**SITES of CONSCIENCE**

**The International Coalition of Sites of Conscience (ICSC or the Coalition)** is a global network of museums, historic sites and grassroots initiatives dedicated to building a more just and peaceful future through engaging communities in remembering struggles for human rights and addressing their modern repercussions. Founded in 1999, the ICSC now includes more than 250 Sites of Conscience members in 65 countries. The ICSC supports these members through seven regional networks that encourage collaboration and international exchange of knowledge and best practices.

Learn more at [www.sitesofconscience.org](http://www.sitesofconscience.org)

**Cover photo:**

2019 GITJR Psychosocial Support Training in Conakry, Guinea.

# ABOUT THIS TOOLKIT

Founded by the International Coalition of Sites of Conscience, the Global Initiative for Justice, Truth and Reconciliation (GIJTR) is a Consortium of nine organizations around the globe dedicated to multidisciplinary, integrated and holistic approaches to transitional justice.

Published in 2021, this toolkit was compiled by the Centre for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation (CSVr), a GIJTR partner and an independent nonprofit organization working toward understanding violence, healing its effects and building sustainable peace and reconciliation in South Africa, the region and throughout the rest of the world. This involves engaging in targeted research and advocacy with civil society and state institutions (both nationally and regionally) and working with individuals and communities through the delivery of direct interventions.

Learn More at [www.csvr.org.za](http://www.csvr.org.za)  
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## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

### STATEMENT OF SOLIDARITY

The author and publishers of this field-guide wish to express their solidarity with all people who have faced violence, sexual violence, torture, displacement and other violations of their human rights. We acknowledge the great struggle that still exists in many parts of the world for freedom, equality, human rights and dignity.

We honor those who have sought and continue to seek peace, restoration, justice and empowerment for themselves and their communities.

### DEDICATION

This field guide is dedicated to the men and women who bravely seek to find pathways to healing and have tirelessly committed themselves to rebuilding fractured communities throughout Africa.

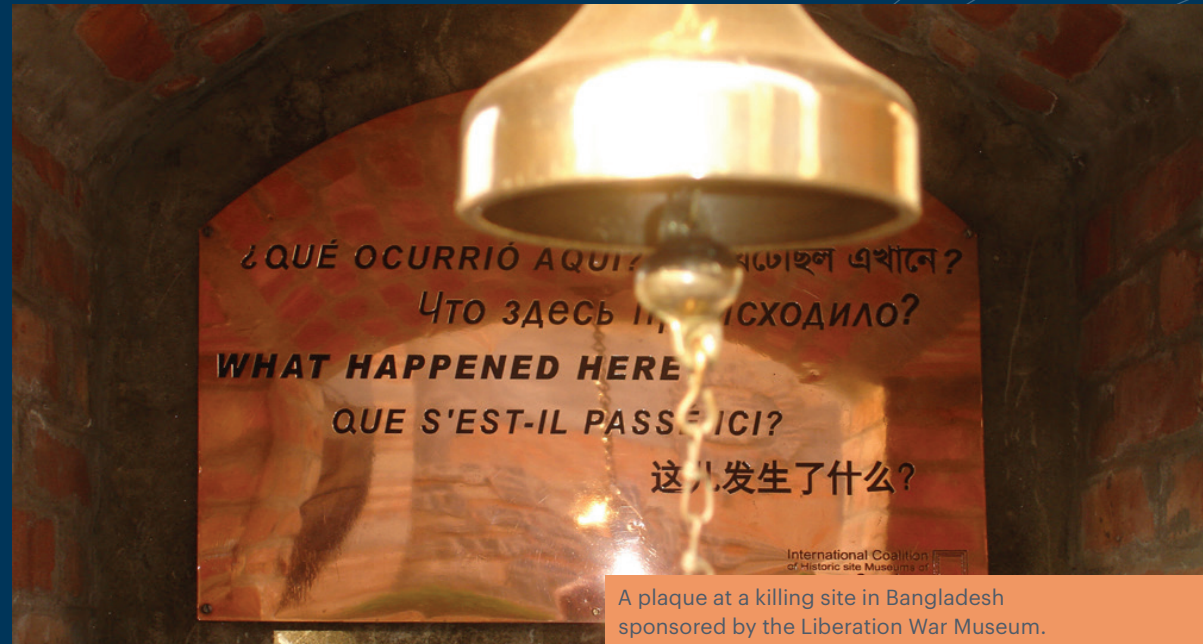
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Learn more about GIJTR at  
[www.gijtr.org](http://www.gijtr.org)

# ABOUT THE GLOBAL INITIATIVE FOR JUSTICE, TRUTH AND RECONCILIATION (GIJTR)

Around the world, there are increasing calls for justice, truth and reconciliation in countries where legacies of gross human rights violations cast a shadow on transitions from repressive regimes to participatory and democratic forms of governance.

To meet this need, the International Coalition of Sites of Conscience (ICSC or the Coalition) launched the Global Initiative for Justice, Truth and Reconciliation (GIJTR) in August 2014. GIJTR seeks to address new challenges in countries in conflict or transition that are struggling with legacies of or ongoing gross human rights abuses. The Coalition leads the GIJTR, which includes eight other organizational partners: American Bar Association Rule of Law Initiative (ABA ROLI), United States; Asia Justice and Rights (AJAR), Indonesia;



A plaque at a killing site in Bangladesh sponsored by the Liberation War Museum.

Centre for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation (CSVR), South Africa; Documentation Center of Cambodia (DC-Cam), Cambodia; Due Process of Law Foundation (DPLF), United States; Fundación de Antropología Forense de Guatemala (FAFG), Guatemala; Humanitarian Law Center (HLC), Serbia; and Public International Law & Policy Group (PILPG), United States. In addition to leveraging the expertise of GIJTR members, the Coalition taps into the knowledge and longstanding community connections of its 300-plus members in 65 countries to strengthen and broaden the GIJTR's work.

GIJTR partners, along with members of the Coalition, develop and implement a range of rapid-response and high-impact program activities, using both restorative and retributive approaches to justice and accountability for gross



human rights violations. The expertise of the organizations under the GIJTR includes:

- Truth telling, reconciliation, memorialization and other forms of historical memory;
- Documenting human rights abuses for transitional justice purposes;
- Forensic analysis and other efforts related to missing and disappeared persons;
- Victims' advocacy such as improving access to justice, psychosocial support and trauma mitigation activities;
- Providing technical assistance to and building the capacity of civil society activists and organizations to promote and engage in transitional justice processes;
- Reparative justice initiatives; and
- Ensuring gender justice in all these processes.

To date, the GIJTR has led civil society actors in multiple countries in the development and implementation of documentation and truth-telling projects; undertaken assessments of the memorialization, documentation and psychosocial support capacities of local organizations; and provided survivors in Asia, Africa and the Middle East and North Africa region with training, support and opportunities to participate in the design and implementation of community-driven transitional justice approaches. Given the diversity of experience and skills among GIJTR partners and among Coalition network members, the program offers post-conflict countries and countries emerging from repressive regimes a unique opportunity to address transitional justice needs in a timely manner, while promoting local participation and building the capacity of community partners.



A 2018 GIJTR exhibition of body-maps in Conakry, Guinea.

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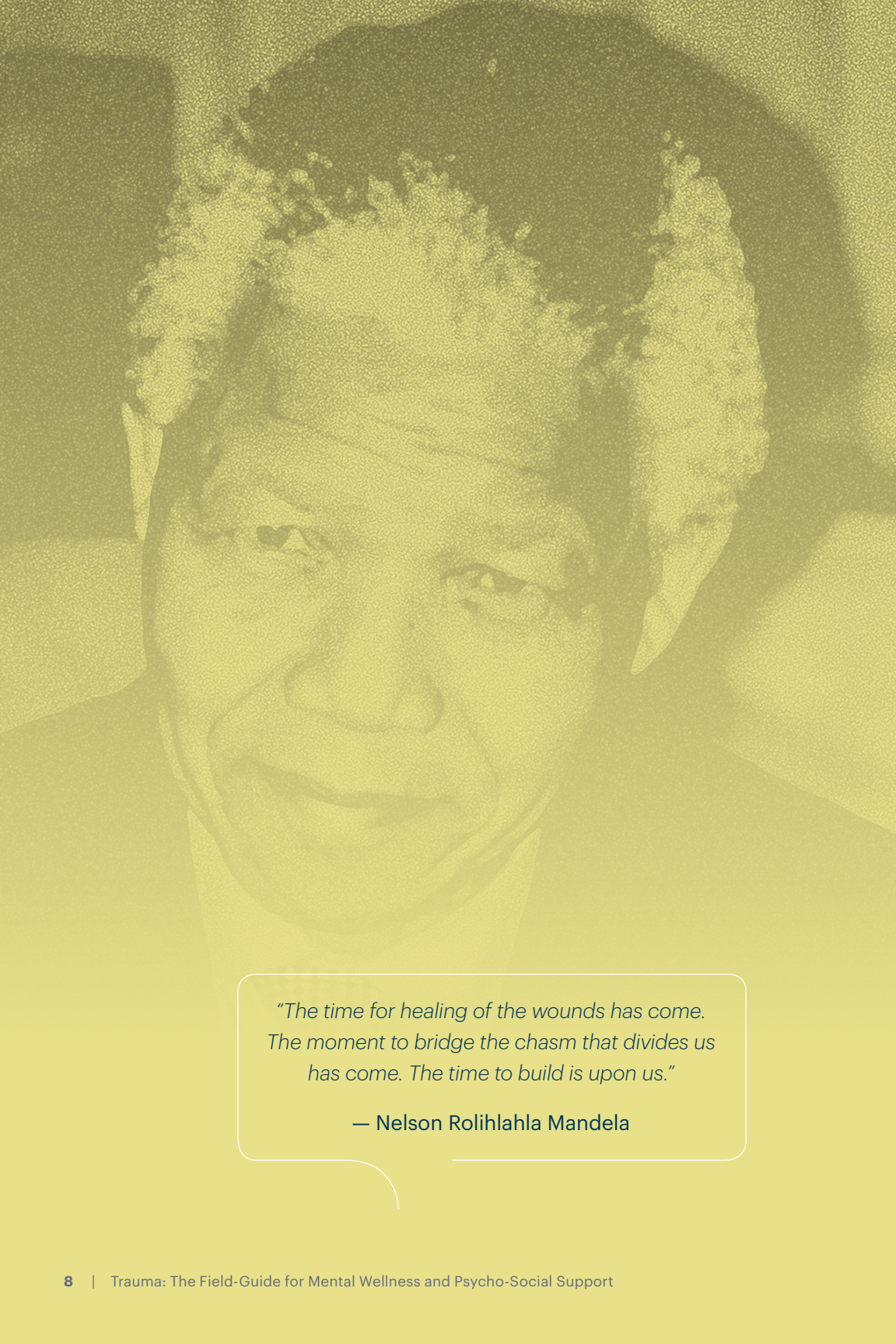
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*"The time for healing of the wounds has come.  
The moment to bridge the chasm that divides us  
has come. The time to build is upon us."*

— Nelson Rolihlahla Mandela

# INTRODUCTION

## What is this Guide About?

All people on planet earth will, at some point in their lives experience pain, loss, fear, illness or terror. We refer to these bad experiences collectively as **trauma**. No person is immune to, or safe from the negative experiences that we see all around us, however each person has some power to lessen the effects of trauma and help themselves heal.

Seeking healing is an act of pure courage. There is no task that requires greater courage and small but powerful acts of bravery, than facing what has most hurt you.

This guide will help you to understand your own trauma, build empathy for yourself and to start the healing journey for yourself. By doing this you will also develop more understanding and empathy for yourself, your family, your community those you work with. Remember, healing starts with the self, and we cannot help each other until we have learned to help ourselves. This guide aims to show you practical steps for doing this and how to help those you work with to begin their journeys.

Stay alert and attentive to what is going on inside you as you start the healing journey.

### CHAPTER OUTCOMES



Understand what this guide is about, how it works and what you can get from it.

## Who is This Guide For?

This guide has been created as a tool to enable and empower psychosocial supporters to.

- Understand the impact of trauma that comes with being a psychosocial supporter or working/ living in contexts that may expose you to trauma.
- Developing a trauma-informed approach in the work you do.
- Tools to assist you to deal with and manage the trauma.
- How these tools can help your work with trauma victims/ survivors.

Having said that, this guide can be useful to any person, of any culture, and can be adapted to different contexts for those who have experienced suffering and are searching for ways to cope with **emotional** and **psychological pain**.

## How Can You Get the Most Out of this Guide?

This guidebook is designed to help you understand how what has happened to you, is affecting you and leading to feelings, thoughts, behaviors and life experiences which could cause damage. In this guidebook we will teach you to apply this understanding, along with some tools, to help you cope and to start the process of healing from your painful experiences.

Throughout the guidebook, we will also provide some guidance for those who wish to help others recover from their trauma.

Right now, let's look at trauma in a little more detail to understand what it is and how it affects those who have been impacted by it.

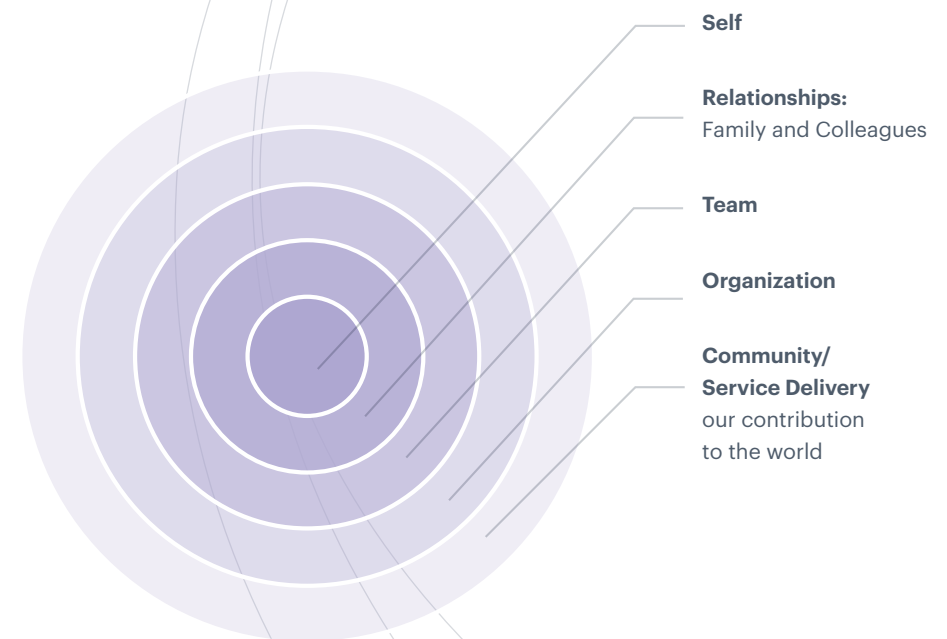
## Guiding Principles of the Guidebook

**THE INFORMATION CONTAINED IN THE TOOLKIT IS BASED ON THE FOLLOWING GUIDING PRINCIPLES:**

## ALL CHANGE STARTS WITH THE SELF

Understanding oneself (and changing one's own knowledge, attitudes and behavior) is the first and essential step towards understanding and influencing change in others (e.g., in the community and broader society). Therefore, it is important that the providers of psychosocial support are not unaware of the impact that their own trauma has had on them, how much of this trauma is resolved versus unprocessed and how this trauma may influence their ability to help others and/or make them more vulnerable to vicarious trauma or to the retriggering of their trauma as they carry out their work with survivors. As Russ Hudson, co-founder of the Enneagram Institute, notes: the impact we create in the world is dependent on our relationship with ourselves.

The following diagram of concentric circles demonstrates the ripple effect outwards from self.



A person is embedded within a particular context which it influences and in turn is influenced by.

To understand a person's response to trauma, we must look at the person, their immediate surroundings, and the interaction of the broader environment as well. American psychologist Urie Bronfenbrenner recognized that a person's development was affected by everything in their surrounding environment – from the immediate settings of family and school to broad cultural values, laws and customs. When providing psychosocial support to survivors of violence and human rights violations, one cannot remove that person from their environment and need to consider all of the factors impacting on them.

## CHAPTER 1

# TRAUMA

### WHAT IS TRAUMA?

In the introduction to this section trauma is loosely explained as the pain, fear, loss, illness or terror we sometimes experience in life. Trauma, however, is all those things and more. It is usually characterized by feelings of helplessness, terror and fear for one's life or safety or for the life of another.

Trauma is most often the result of unexpected events but expected events can cause trauma too. Trauma, however, is not the event itself but is more related to the way the event impacts our mind, body and emotions.

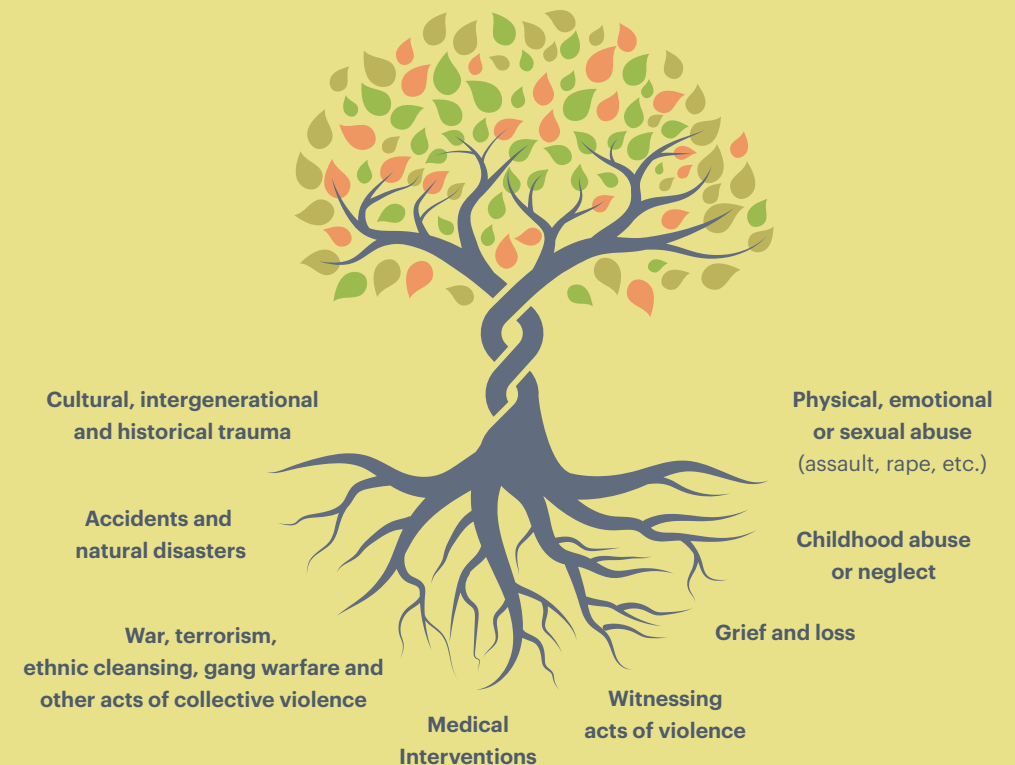
#### CHAPTER OUTCOMES



Understand more about how trauma affects the individual.

Gain an understanding of how trauma impacts family groups and apply the tools presented to assist families to cope with trauma.

Understand how trauma unfolds in communities and the associated dangers for greater society.







are more acknowledging of their emotions, may openly cry or express pain.

Where this is the case, men are less likely to express their thoughts or feelings related to trauma and may even deny having been traumatized, whereas women are more likely to talk about their trauma and also seek professional help.

#### 4. Trauma with different causes, impact people differently.

Traumatic events which have been caused by other people are perceived as being more painful and inducing more suffering than natural events.

When trauma is created by people, particularly when it is done deliberately as in the case of torture or murder, the following questions arise: “How could they do that to people, or to me?” and “Why has this happened to me?” These questions and others which are searching for logical reasons, often go unanswered. This creates deep dissatisfaction and can prolong the emotional effects of trauma.

When trauma is inflicted by one person or another (or by groups onto other groups, as was the case in the Rwandan genocide and South African Apartheid, there is a clear victim and a clear perpetrator. Struggling with trying to identify the reasons why people may commit such atrocities can ensure that victims, families, communities and societies remain entrenched in their pain and anger for a long time. Sometimes decades.

However, when traumatic events are caused by nature, for example tornadoes and earthquakes, we do not ask the questions which seek a logical reason. As humans we understand that nature is often unpredictable and that the traumatic event could have been experienced by anyone. Usually, in natural disasters many people would have experienced the event simultaneously. The collective sharing of the resulting pain, shock and loss helps communities to heal together. In natural disasters there is no real perpetrator or culprit and therefore no-one to blame or forgive. It is easier to recover from natural disasters than from man-made ones, although that does not necessarily make it easier.

##### DID YOU KNOW?

Human beings are meaning-creatures therefore we create stories around painful experiences, and these stories can deepen our suffering. Story creation takes place in the neocortex of the brain.

#### 5. Your manner of thinking can have a strong effect on your experience.

How we think about a traumatic event, or the meaning associated with the event can influence how we respond to the event. If we believe we were responsible for what happened, there can be associated shame and guilt and it can be difficult to overcome the impacts of the event. We have the power to reduce our emotional and psychological pain by changing the way we think about events. For example, many rape victims believe that something they did allowed for the event to take place. So, when you are able to help them understand that what happened was wrong, no matter what they did, they can begin to think about the event differently.

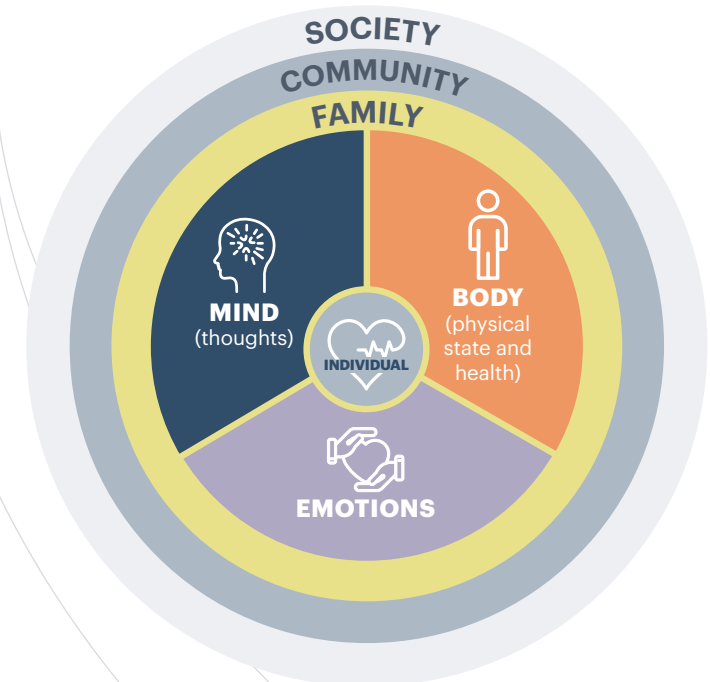
One way of changing the way we think about painful or traumatic events is to recognize that each of our life experiences is an opportunity for us to learn and grow. But we'll talk more about that in a later section of this field-guide.

##### DID YOU KNOW?

Trauma is any event that overwhelms your normal coping strategies

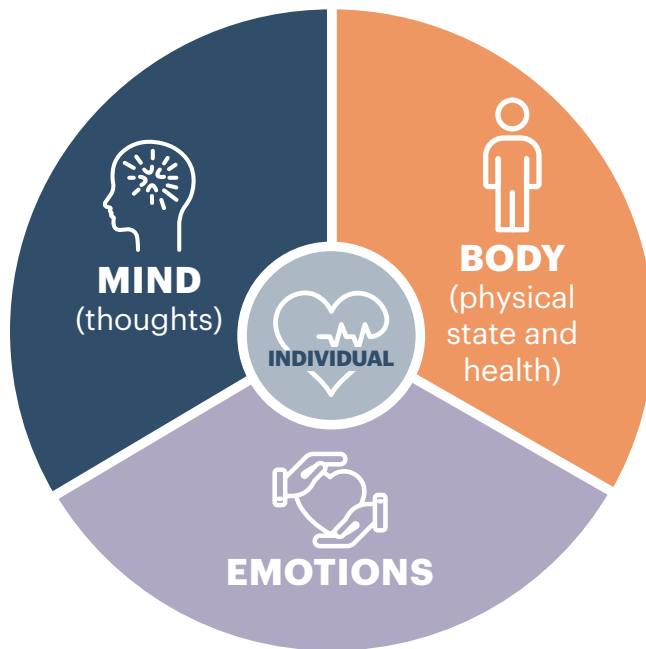
#### 6. Trauma is not in isolation.

Often, we speak about the impact of trauma on the individual but the effects and impacts are across different levels, which will be further explored throughout this chapter.



## TRAUMA AND THE INDIVIDUAL

As we now know, trauma affects people differently depending on a wide range of circumstances and pre-existing conditions. Despite the differences, we know that all people are affected on three physical levels as well as on the spiritual level.



A human being is made up of mind, body emotions and spirituality, or life force.

### DID YOU KNOW?

The fight and flight response also includes the urge to freeze or faint. When someone senses danger they may instinctively choose to defend or attack, run, stay still or pass out.

## POSSIBLE EFFECTS OF TRAUMA

on your physical body, your thoughts,  
your feelings and your behavior

**Difficulty concentrating**

**Depression**

**Anxiety  
panic attacks**

**Feelings of worthlessness**  
(I'm worthless,"  
"I'm a failure")

**Chronic pain**  
e.g. headaches  
stomach aches,  
sore neck,  
sore muscles

**Poor  
appetite**

**Difficulty  
sleeping**

**Loss of interest**

**Withdraw  
from others**

**Difficulty  
making decisions**

**Stop doing  
enjoyable things**

**Loss of memory**  
(Amnesia)

**Hopelessness**  
(loss of a sense  
of the future)

**Uncontrollable  
emotional  
reactions**

**Feelings of  
guilt and shame**  
("It's my fault")

**Weight loss  
or weight gain**

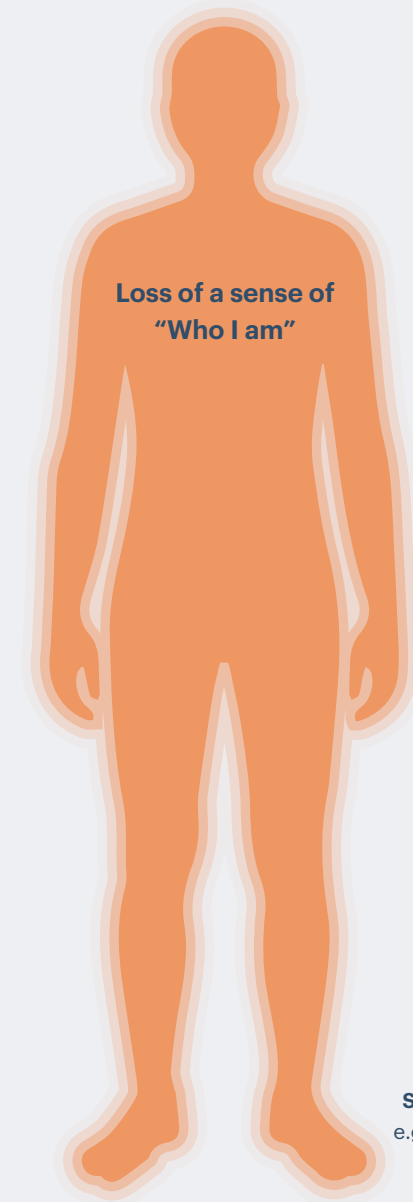
**Lack of  
confidence**

**Irritability**

**Mistrust of  
others**

**Tired all the time**

**Self-destructive behavior,**  
e.g. alcohol and drug abuse,  
eating disorders,  
risky sexual behavior





## 1. The Physiology of Trauma

While the brain is a complex structure there are two key parts which are.

### Logical (Thinking) Brain

- Allows us to think before we act
- Responsible for decision-making and self-awareness
- Allows us to control our emotions and bodily functions, have empathy for others and focus/concentrate
- Rational
- Logical
- Slow
- 5 x weaker

### Emotional (Feeling) Brain

- Allows us to act before we think
- Responsible for our emotional reactions
- Responsible for our bodily functions
- Irrational
- Illogical
- Fast
- 5 x more powerful

### CASE STUDY

Abdoulie is a member of the LGBTIQA+ community, together with his colleagues they were confronted by men dressed in police uniform on their way from a protest. Abdoulie started apologizing for being at the protest and kept stating that he agrees with them that the LGBTIQA+ people are a disgrace to the country.

#### A: FAWN

At the time of a traumatic event, we rely on automatic physical responses, particularly the activation of the autonomic nervous systems. When an individual is exposed to a situation that they experience as traumatic, the fight, flight- freeze- fawn response is activated. When this response is activated, we act from a space of high emotions, where our logical brain is no longer in control.

While this response is often essential in helping an individual survive a threat, it is also the same response that is triggered by a perceived threat (real or imagined) or a reminder of the trauma.

## 2. How Trauma Affects the Body

### FIGHT-FLIGHT AND THE BODY

During the fight-flight response, which is also called the stress response, an enormous surge of hormones are released into the body. The purpose of this is to sharpen the senses of hearing and vision, to make muscles move faster and to accelerate the heart rate and breathing in preparation to fight or run.

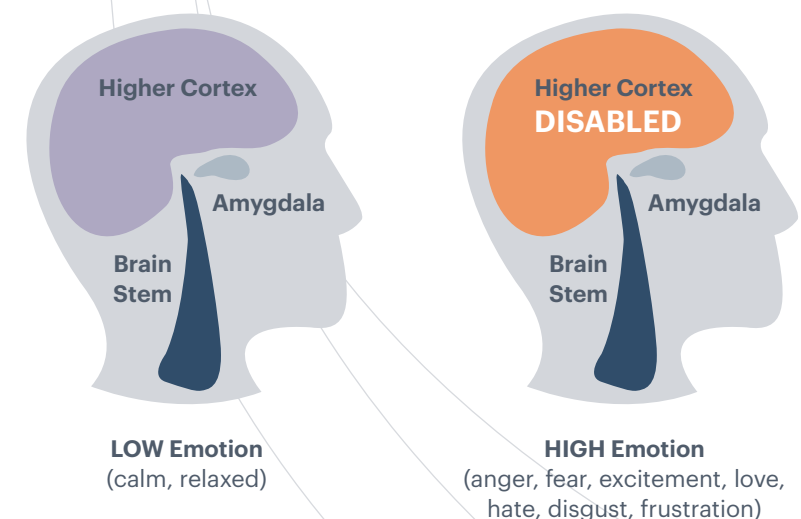
This short-term process is meant to last just a few minutes which should be long enough to escape from danger. However, in high stress situations the brain tells the body to release these hormones repeatedly.

The body is not meant to be in a state of constant stress and prolonged exposure to the stress response hormones can have negative effects in the long run. An oversupply of stress hormones in the body becomes like driving a car with fuel made for jet planes. It is too much and too fast. Eventually the engine will burn out or the car will get out of control and crash. This is why it is difficult for people to self-regulate in the aftermath of trauma. To help prevent this it is good to learn methods to help the mind and body calm down during times of high stress.

### CASE STUDY

Aissatou is a lawyer with a human rights legal institution representing community members who are taking a big mining company to court to prevent them from expanding an already existing mine that has led to environmental damages to their land. Since the court case started Aissatou has been receiving threatening phone calls and sometimes she thinks there is someone following her, as a result she has decided to leave the institution and go back to practicing corporate law.

#### A: FLIGHT



Techniques that help with this are grounding and mindfulness techniques such as the body scan, included in the guidebook.



### 3. How trauma affects the emotions

In the aftermath of a traumatic event, as the fight or flight response subsides, people are often in shock (frozen emotions) or overwhelmed with uncontrollable emotions. In combination with the onslaught of emotion people often display behavior that seems uncharacteristic but could be regarded as normal, given the circumstances.

Some of the most common emotional responses to trauma can include but are not limited to.

- Fear
- Confusion
- Terror
- Desperation
- Grief
- Sorrow
- Anxiety
- Helplessness

#### DID YOU KNOW?

Grounding and mindfulness techniques are useful for self-awareness and regulation at times of distress.

Of course, the list of possible emotions is much longer than this and no two people will feel the exact same emotions or experience them to the same degree. But as we are one species; these emotions can be found in trauma survivors from all parts of the world.

The emotions of trauma survivors who have experienced prolonged trauma is somewhat different. In the case of long-term abuse and conflict with regular threat to one's life and great uncertainty, victims can suppress their emotions in order to survive. They are afraid of allowing themselves to feel.

### EMOTIONS AND VULNERABILITY

**Vulnerability** is the term to describe situations in which human beings face uncertainly, risk and emotional exposure.

It is extremely difficult to share or even acknowledge one's emotions if you do not feel physically and psychologically safe enough to do so. The creation of this safety is one of the key roles that therapists and psycho-social support professionals play. However, it works best when the traumatic event is over.

When a victim or victims of trauma are still within the grip of an ongoing traumatic event, for example war, it may not feel like they can allow themselves to be vulnerable enough to allow the emotions to be acknowledged or shared. For the sake of physical survival, emotions are bottled up and put aside. The fight-flight response plays a role in this as well. During this hyper aroused state, one is in survival mode where there is always a perceived threat. Which makes it almost impossible to be emotionally vulnerable.

Furthermore, if the traumatic situation continues for a very long time, the victim's ability to feel, think about and talk about their emotions may diminish and have a prolonged impact on other areas of their lives.

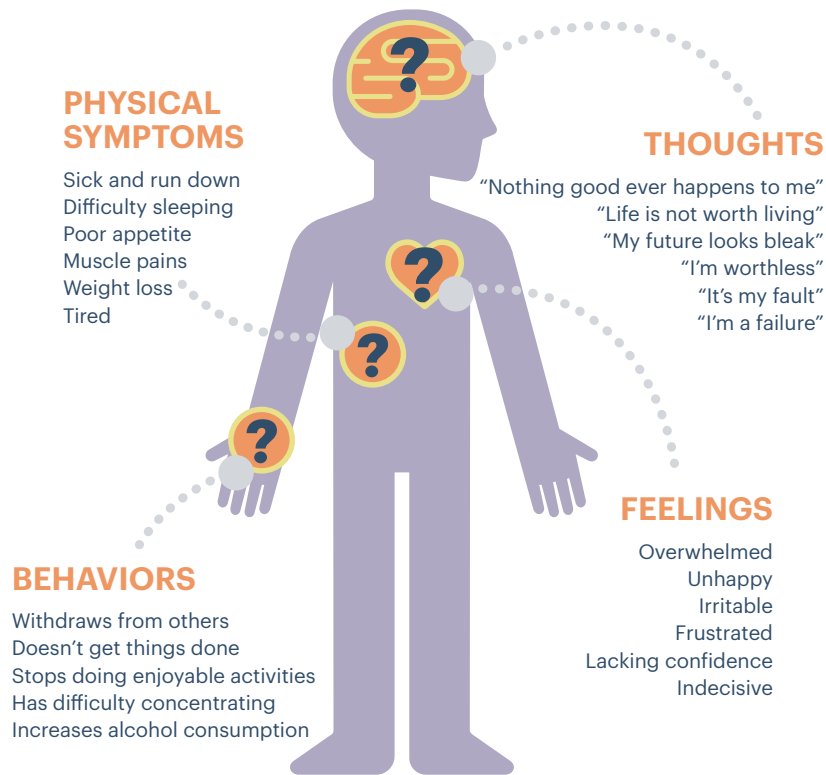
#### CASE STUDY

Mariama a small subsistence farmer is being forced to move from her land which has been in her family for more than five generations. A group of private security hired by the company came to evict her from her home last night; all her belongings were thrown outside and whilst this was happening, she stood by and watched unable to move.

#### A: FREEZE

#### DID YOU KNOW?

The lack of physical and psychological safety makes it difficult to share or acknowledge difficult emotions.



#### 4. How Trauma Affects the Mind

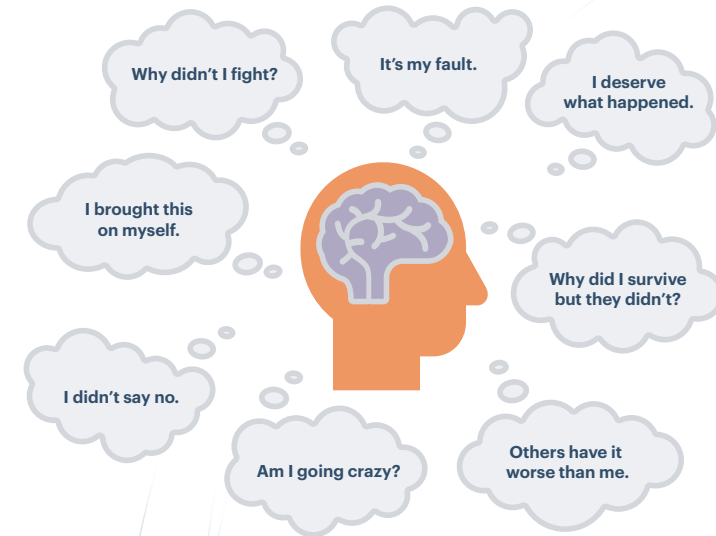
The systems of the human body are entirely interconnected. None of our systems function independently of the others and a change to one part of the system usually affects others as well.

While in survival mode, it is common to experience racing thoughts. This is a product of the brain, very quickly, trying to assess the danger and decide on the best course of action. It happens so fast that we do not have the time to fully notice each thought. This process is part of our survival instinct and is activated outside of our awareness and control.

##### DID YOU KNOW?

Trauma is universal, but each person's experience of the trauma is different

However, in the aftermath, the body regulates, and we can begin to think again. This makes us think about the event and all the things in relation to the event and our responses to it, some thoughts which can worsen the effects of trauma:



These thoughts create feelings of self-blame or **guilt** and vice versa. The difficult reality is that it also gives the brain the opportunity to build painful imaginary stories around the traumatic event. This combination can make it much more difficult for trauma survivors to find healing. There is very little any one person can do to stop a catastrophic or tragic event. There is also not much we can do about our immediate reaction as this is governed by subconscious processes and instinct. However, each adult person can, to the best of their ability take command of their thoughts and steer them towards healing and recovery. Our minds are our most powerful tools for regaining control of ourselves and hopefully going beyond healing into growth and transformation.

#### 5. Behavior and the Effect on the Body

In the aftermath, while we are trying to make sense of what happened we rely on different Behavioral responses that help us to cope.

While these strategies develop to help us survive, there are some that are useful and help contribute to our

##### DID YOU KNOW?

There is no time limited to being in survival mode. This is a necessary response until safety is established, whether physical or psychological.



healing while others can be destructive and prolong the impacts or trauma. To combat this, it is good for individuals to identify positive coping skills and work towards using these.

What can be useful here is to be aware of the strategies you currently use.

#### DID YOU KNOW?

What you are going through and experiencing is a normal response to an abnormal event

#### Positive Strategies

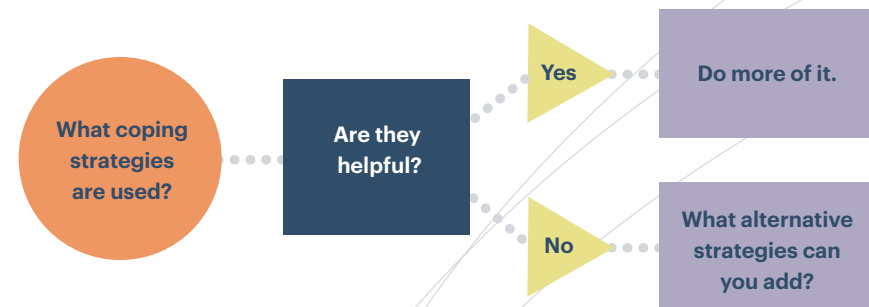
- Listening to music
- Playing with a pet
- Laughing or crying
- Going out with a friend (shopping, movie, dining)
- Taking a bath or shower
- Writing, painting, or doing other creative activities
- Praying or going to church
- Exercising or getting outdoors to enjoy nature
- Discussing situations with a spouse or close friend
- Gardening or making home repairs
- Practicing deep breathing, meditation, or muscle relaxation
- Making and following through with an action plan to solve your problems.
- Seeking counseling if you continue to struggle with stress.

#### Negative Strategies

- Criticizing yourself (negative self-talk)
- Driving fast in a car
- Chewing your fingernails
- Becoming aggressive or violent (hitting someone, throwing or kicking something)
- Eating too much or too little or drinking a lot of coffee
- Smoking or chewing tobacco
- Drinking alcohol
- Yelling at your spouse, children, or friends
- Taking a recreational drug, or misusing prescription medicine
- Avoiding friends and family

#### DID YOU KNOW?

A coping mechanism is behavior or response that we use to help us manage an unbearable or overwhelming situation or emotion.



## WHAT CAN I DO?

Trauma affects us all differently, so the support needed differs from person to person. The useful things that can help are:

#### Emotional Awareness

- Self reflection
- Body scan
- Feeling person
- Feelings chart

#### Self-regulation Skills

- Grounding
- Mindfulness
- Breathing
- Meditation

#### Coping Mechanisms

- What are my coping mechanisms?
- Accessing support
- STOPP
- Circle of concern/ circle of influence
- Problem solving skills

In addition, identify the necessary referral pathways, see referral guidelines in the tools section of the guideline.

## 4. TRAUMA IN FAMILIES

### A Traumatized Individual in the Context of Family

When trauma strikes an individual, it also affects the family. Most affected are the individuals who live with the trauma survivor. This is called secondary traumatization and refers to the process of being traumatized by witnessing or indirectly being exposed to someone else's trauma. Children in particular, can be susceptible to secondary traumatization because they lack the vocabulary and understanding to make sense of what is happening. This is compounded further if the trauma survivor is a primary caregiver. When children see a primary caregiver in great pain or suffering, they fear that their world is no longer secure. This frightens them and produces a sense of helplessness.

This does not mean that we should shield children from being aware of trauma, but rather that we should provide support to help them feel safe despite what is happening around them.

Spouses and other adults can also be affected by secondary traumatization. This can happen particularly if they feel helpless, afraid and have lost a sense of safety and security.

For these reasons, it is important when doing psychosocial support work, to engage the survivor within the context of the family. Often counseling or other interventions are most helpful when the full primary family group is able to participate.

### Traumatized Families

Sometimes tragedy and disaster befall an entire family and not just one individual. An example of this would be a home invasion in which the entire family is victimized. Or the death of a loved one in which the entire family feels the loss directly.

#### CASE STUDY



Lamin was arrested for being in the wrong place at the wrong time, where they thought he was participating in a protest. He was unlawfully detained for 6 months, during which he was tortured. When X returned home, his family noticed he was different; he would get irritable quickly, sit by himself for hours and sometimes wake up screaming in the night. The family starts feeling scared of doing anything that may cause him to react aggressively.

Although all the members of the family experience the same traumatic event, each person will respond to that in their own unique way.

Remembering that gender, age cultural and other factors influence the way people are affected by trauma, it is important to note that psychosocial interventions need to respect individual differences.

Different members of the family may need more time or may require non-conversational types of interventions like play therapy or other intervention options. The value of a support and referral network for all psychosocial support workers cannot be overstated. When this professional network is in place it allows for all the family members to be treated in the way that best meets their needs.

### Long Term Effects of Trauma in Families

When trauma in a family context is left unresolved; when little or no communication about what has happened and how people have been affected may lead to isolation within the family unit. Families may not communicate because of the

- Fear of being judged
- Feeling of shame, guilt or self-blame
- The belief that others will not understand
- Not having the correct words to explain or express themselves
- Desire to protect others from being traumatized (by the story)
- Desire to not be a burden unto others

Unhealed woundedness is the fertile soil in which greater woundedness can take root. Unresolved trauma plays an enormous role in destructive

#### DID YOU KNOW?



Individuals are embedded in families. Families in turn are part of the community. Society is made up of many communities. When a critical mass of individuals or families are traumatized, over time entire communities and eventually all of society is traumatized.

#### CASE STUDY



Fatoumata is an opposition leader who has been under threat from the government as the elections get closer. She and her family were relocated to a place of safety in another country. The change has been difficult on the family; her husband had to leave his job and cannot work in the new country. The children are in a new school where they do not speak their language. The family blames her for the difficulties they are experiencing.

behavior patterns including domestic and sexual violence, unemployment, addiction (including drugs, alcohol and pornography).

In children unresolved familial trauma could lead to early drug use; promiscuity and exposure to sexually transmitted diseases and early pregnancy; violence, gang membership and dropping out of school.

The more families in a community carry the deeply painful burden of unresolved trauma, the more likely it is that an entire community will carry this trauma.

## WHAT CAN I DO?

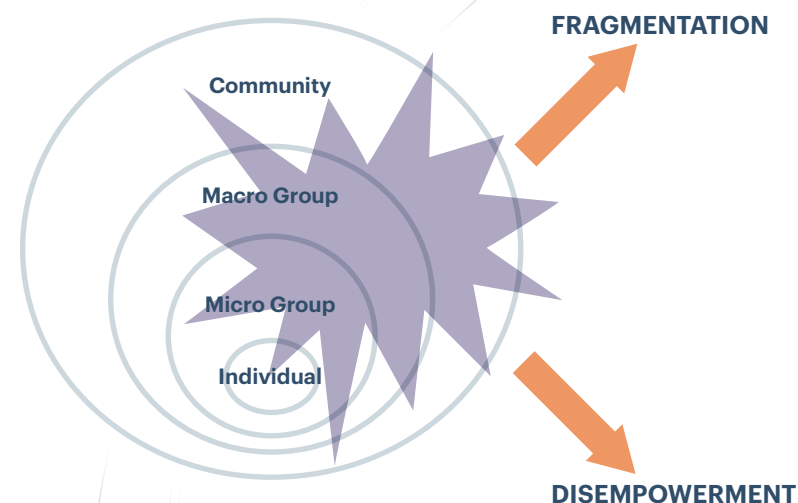
Within families we can utilize different strategies to help them cope with trauma within the family system.

Emotional awareness	Self-regulation skills	Coping mechanisms	Communication skills
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Self reflection</li> <li>• Body scan</li> <li>• Feeling person</li> <li>• Feelings chart</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Grounding</li> <li>• Mindfulness</li> <li>• Breathing</li> <li>• Meditation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What are my coping mechanisms?</li> <li>• Accessing support</li> <li>• STOPP</li> <li>• Circle of concern/ circle of influence</li> <li>• Problem solving skills</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Psychoeducation</li> <li>• Creating safe spaces</li> <li>• Learning the language</li> </ul>

In addition, identify the necessary referral pathways (see referral guidelines in the tools section of the guideline).

## 5. TRAUMA IN COMMUNITIES AND SOCIETIES

Individual trauma and its impact can be multiplied and felt at a community level. There is a loss of meaningful, supportive and healing processes within the community. This can lead to a breakdown in community communication structures. This can all result in fragmented and disempowered communities.



### CASE STUDY

Country Y has been in conflict for the past 50 years and as a result violence, conflict and oppression have become normalized. There was also a perceived favouritism of the President's ethnic group. During the last elections only 20% of the population registered to vote. After the elections the military staged a coup, and the pro-democracy movement has been trying to get citizens to support this with no success, as they cannot agree on the chosen leader due to ethnic divisions.

When communities, neighborhoods, tribes, villages, or cultural or religious groups of people are all trauma carriers certain defined social patterns begin to emerge. Some of these patterns are positive and some are dysfunctional, dangerous and destructive. The positive patterns encourage people to support each other and heal together, while the dysfunctional patterns add even more trauma.

One of the biggest issues for communities burdened with collective trauma in this manner, is that the trauma becomes self-perpetuating. There is an expression that says. "hurt people, hurt people" and that becomes ever truer for communities in pain.



## WHAT CAN I DO?

At a community and societal level, the healing strategies and interventions that can be useful are also quite complex. But what we can do is promote certain practices.

- Increased communication and understanding within the community
- Promote community-based healing practices.

In addition, identify the necessary referral pathways, see referral guidelines in the tools section of the guideline.

### DID YOU KNOW?

Loss can be physical or symbolic or both.

## 6. LOSS, GRIEF, BEREAVEMENT AND MOURNING

### Types of Loss

There are many forms of loss that people may experience over the course of a lifetime.

Loss can be both a physical loss where we lose someone we care about through death or disappearance, the physical loss of possessions and land or it can come in the form of symbolic loss which is described as an intangible psychological loss such as a loss of identity, a loss of a sense of self.

The loss of a loved one can be one of the most unbearable forms of loss and results in a number of different psychological processes.

Loss can affect the physical, social and psychological wellbeing of an individual.

The context in which the loss occurs is also a major determining factor of mental health impacts.

### CASE STUDY

Souleymanes' uncle was an activist. The police came one night and took him. The family tried to get information but it's been three years and they have heard nothing official. There are different rumours that a group of prisoners escaped and fled to a neighbouring country whilst others claim that there was a mass killing in the prisons. John and his family do not know what happened to the uncle, they are hopeful that he will return or that they will one day get his body to bury.

- **Ambiguous loss:** This is the process in which the loss is not clear. There is no tangible proof of the loss. Because the loss is unclear the individual is unable to process the loss or move into the grieving process. Individuals often hold onto the hope that the loss is not real and that there is a chance that the person is alive.
- **Grief:** Grief is a process as well as a reaction to loss. This is a normal reaction to a loss and through the process the individual disinvests the energy attached to the object. At the end of the process the individual is able to accept the loss. Although it remains a significant event in a person's life, they are not governed by the loss. Grieving a loss is a normal process but when the process is either prolonged or delayed and impacts the individual's level of functioning it can become complicated grief.
- **Bereavement:** Bereavement is the time period after the loss in which the individual takes to adapt.

### Common Reactions to Sudden Loss

- A search for meaning about why this happened
- Changes in sleep, appetite and energy
- Overwhelming feelings of sadness

These are normal responses, and it is only when these are either prolonged or delayed and impact the individual's level of functioning, that it can become cause for concern.

### Process of Grief

Kubler Ross describes five stages of grief that most individuals experience when confronted with a potential loss or in the aftermath of a loss.

1. **Denial:** To deny the reality of the situation and loss and often become numb
2. **Anger:** Once the reality has been accepted many will become angry (at different people or situations) and try search for answers. "why me?" or "this isn't fair". This provides the individual with a defense against what is happening.

3. **Bargaining:** This is the pleading and bargaining for things or the situation to be different
4. **Depression:** This is normal and is the stage in which the individual is overcome with the sadness of the reality of the situation.
5. **Acceptance:** Where the individual accepts the loss

This is not a linear process, rather, individuals may move forwards and backwards between stages or start at different stages.

## WHAT CAN I DO?

Many families who have lost a family member as a result of enforced disappearances often experience ambiguous loss or complicated grief. Therefore, when working with a family we need to be aware of these psychological responses. There are various factors which determine how one may respond to someone experiencing ambiguous loss or complicated grief. Their context; personal characteristics; the type and level of engagement/relationship with the person and the nature of their psychosocial needs, all play a role in determining the best way to assist.

### Counseling and Psychosocial support

Due to the individual or family being unable to get closure, the counseling process and PSS often focuses on trying to support this process. In cases where the death of the loved one has been confirmed we can help the individual or family think of different practices that may help give them closure. As we know the burial process is the main process that helps families, in the cases where there is no body this can be difficult. Therefore, by helping the individual think of something, such as a memory box or a family prayer process, we can help them think about and implement this in line with their culture and religion.

## CHAPTER 2

# SELF-CARE FOR PSYCHOSOCIAL SUPPORTERS

As civil society members and community psychosocial supporters you are in the front-line of the battle to restore dignity, peace and humanity to those who have experienced gross violations of their human rights. However, the nature of your work also means that you are exposed to a large amount of trauma, discomfort, pain and sometimes helplessness.

The trauma acquired through your work often takes a toll on mental, emotional, psychological and physical health over an extended period. Unfortunately, most often it is true that those who work at the forefront of social justice do not realize how much trauma and pain they have accumulated in the course of their work. In this section of the field-guide we provide you with some practical tools to help you become aware of and manage the trauma wounding and pain you may have accumulated due to your work as a human rights defender. We encourage you try these exercises and to adopt the practices that work for you. Many of these tools are also applicable and effective when used to assist other individuals and families who need help with healing. If any of the exercises of principle below produce discomfort for you, please do not proceed with them. Use only what seems comfortable, painless and helpful to your self-care and healing.

#### DID YOU KNOW

**VICARIOUS TRAUMA** is trauma that is experienced by exposure to the trauma of others

Being a helping professional is very rewarding, but it can also be very challenging. As with many helping professionals, being exposed to others' pain and trauma on a regular basis increases the risk of stress and burnout.

Thus, taking care of ourselves is critical – for our own long-term health and well-being, and so that we can effectively support the people we work with.

Self-care is the ability to proactively enhance our health by building resilience and preventing illness and disease. There is a preventative focus.

As helpers, we often listen to very tragic and emotionally difficult stories from our clients. This can open us up to feeling their pain. The ultimate challenge is finding ways to stay connected to our clients while maintaining a strong and deep connection with our own experience. We need to be able to understand ourselves, just as much as we need to understand the individuals we are trying to help. This means devoting time to self-reflection, self-renewal and quality time far away from the issues of work.

The path to finding this balance begins with recognizing the warning signs and not feeling ashamed of them. No one is immune to the effects of the work. When we can view our emotional responses to our work as normal and natural (rather than as something we are doing wrong), we are more likely to seek support, talk about our stress with others and engage in self-care practices to support our overall wellness. And when we are well, we are better able to connect with our clients, to be more attentive and creative in our work, and less likely to make errors or violate boundaries.

When helping professionals are isolated – working in rural areas or working as sole private practitioners – maintaining wellness can pose an even bigger challenge. Without other colleagues to learn from, vent with or lean on for support, stress is more likely to build. Therefore, finding a support system (through formal or informal networks of other professionals), to meet with for consultation and camaraderie is vital. Technology can also help bridge the gap. The Internet, e-mail, Facebook and the phone, provide useful means to connect with other people.

## 2.1 WHAT ARE THE WARNING SIGNS?

Trauma-focused work can be emotionally difficult and taxing for psychosocial supporters, leading to vicarious traumatization, burnout, secondary stress disorder, and compassion fatigue. These are various terms used in explaining the different ways that work can affect us and the changes that we may notice in ourselves.

### VICARIOUS TRAUMA

This term is adapted in relation to therapists and workers who may vicariously experience aspects and effects of a client's trauma as though it was a trauma, they themselves had experienced. This is specifically centered on the trauma discussed with a client, generally in the counseling/therapy relationship.

### SECONDARY TRAUMA

Similar to vicarious trauma in that an individual can present with signs of PTSD even though they have not experienced a traumatic event. The distinction is that this is developed through the witnessing of others' experience. This can be both through work and outside of work, such as a family member who has experienced a traumatic event.

### COMPASSION FATIGUE

This is a very general term to try to describe individuals who may be experiencing difficulties due to their work as a helping professional.

### BURNOUT

Often seen as the most extreme whereby an individual's outlook and health have shifted negatively. Specifically due to a work overload. (Rothschild & Rand, 2006).

Common signs that one is heading towards burnout:

#### Behavioral:

- Distancing, numbing, detachment, cutting clients off, staying busy
- Avoid listening to the client's story of traumatic experiences



- Experience symptoms similar to those seen in clients (intrusive imagery, somatic symptoms)
- Impact personal relationships and ability to experience intimacy
- High overall general stress level
- Overextend self and assimilate client's traumatic material
- Difficulty maintaining professional boundaries with the client

#### **Emotional:**

- Feeling overwhelmed, drained, emotionally drained and exhausted, overloaded, and burnt out
- Angry, enraged, or sad about client's victimization

#### **Cognitive:**

- Preoccupied with thoughts of client outside of your work
- Over identification with the client
- Horror and rescue fantasies
- Loss of hope, pessimism, cynicism, nihilism
- Question competence, self-worth, low job satisfaction
- Challenge basic beliefs of safety, trust, esteem, intimacy, and control
- Feel a heightened sense of vulnerability and personal threats

### **STRESS MANAGEMENT**

Managing stress is an important aspect of self-care. Stress management includes dealing with or coping with negative effects. Techniques to relieve stress include deep breathing, meditation and exercise.

## **2.2 HOW YOU CAN PRACTICE SELF-CARE**

### **1. Identify what activities help you feel your best.**

Self-care for one person will mean something completely different for another. One person may need more alone time, for example, while another may nurture herself by spending more time with friends. Rediscover your passions and sense of purpose by finding out what makes you feel good about being you.

### **2. Put it on your calendar – *in ink!***

Take a close look at your calendar and carve out chunks of time for self-care.

### **3. Sneak in self-care where you can.**

If you don't have huge chunks of time, you can still fit in little moments of relaxation. Don't wait to add self-care to your life until your schedule frees up (you might be waiting forever)! Even taking five minutes to close your eyes and take a few deep breaths, or a few minutes of listening to music, can help your stress level.

### **4. Take care of yourself physically.**

This means getting enough rest, eating nutritious foods and exercising. Eat more greens, fruit, nuts, pulses; and don't over-indulge in coffee, alcohol, high fat and sugar foods. Exercise releases the endorphins that give you a feeling of well-being. Even taking a 10-minute walk (alone, with friends or with your children) can make a big difference.

### **5. Know when to say no.**

Your health and well-being come first. So, if you have a hard time saying no, cultivate the skill of setting boundaries.

## 6. Check-in with yourself regularly.

Ask yourself the following critical questions: Are you working too much? Do you feel tapped out? What do you need to take away, and what would you like to add? Check for the warning signs listed above.

## 7. Access social support.

### THIS IS IMPORTANT BECAUSE:

- No person is an island, we need others to help us manage difficult times, and lead a happy life that is manageable
- It helps us to manage stress
- It gives us support, when we need it most
- It provides us with energy when we are struggling
- It allows us to understand that we are not alone (That there are others there, and willing to listen when things feel too much)
- It provides us with relief and helps us continue
- All of us go through tough times and it helps us manage these times

### WAYS OF ACCESSING SOCIAL SUPPORT:

- Talk to a friend either at home or at work – talking about difficulties can help us to manage and express our feelings, leaving us feeling relieved
- Sometimes talking about things allows us to think about things differently and see it from a different perspective
- Try managing tough times before they get tougher. This means if you are having a tough time, make others aware of this, so they can look out for you
- Always ask for support if you need it. It takes strength to ask for help; and everyone needs help at some time.

## 8. Share your story.

Storytelling has always been a powerful method for recalling events and in African traditions it is the way in which we carry our histories from one generation to the next. All human beings have their personal stories, however, unlike the stories of our cultural histories, not every person has earned the right to hear it. Our stories are the expressions of the things that define us. Our personal triumphs, failures and vulnerabilities are ours to treasure. When we share our personal stories, especially those in which we fear judgment or criticism, it is best to share them with people who have deserved to hear them. These are people with whom we have established trust and who we believe will honor and respect us despite the contents of the story. The danger in sharing our vulnerabilities with those who have not earned our trust is that they can cause further harm and make healing much more difficult. Our painful stories need tenderness and kindness to start the process of healing. Seek out people in your life who can offer you this sense of safety and engage with them to help you start the healing process.

It is important not to carry the burden alone or to find a way to release the stress. This can be done through accessing your social support, speaking to colleagues, finding an external person that is trustworthy or journaling.

## 9. Consider the quality of self-care.

Go for quality, especially when the quantity is lacking. Focus on relaxing activities such as prayer, deep breathing, listening to music, journaling and practicing mindfulness. This could also include taking vacations, going to therapy/counseling and taking advantage of peer support groups.

## 10. Remember that self-care is non-negotiable.

In order to live a healthy and rewarding life, self-care is a necessity. With that attitude, it becomes very natural and easy to do.

## 11. Self-care includes:

- Sleep
- Exercise
- Balanced diet
- Personal therapy
- Boundaries
- Social life
- Self-awareness
- Support structure
- Reflective ability
- Personal hygiene

## 12. The value of a belief system.

It is impossible to talk about healing without making reference to spirituality. Spiritual practice helps to provide people with comfort, hope and the connection to the divine. This principle is not about religion, which is the practice of a pre-defined set of beliefs and incorporates ceremonies, traditions and customs linked to specific belief systems. A spiritual practice may have its origins in a religious belief system, but it can exist independently of organized religion. Practicing one's personal spirituality may be a great source of support during times of crisis and may be hugely beneficial to the healing process. Those aspects of spirituality which consider common humanity, unconditional love, kindness and compassion are most helpful in healing.

## 13. Develop a self-care maintenance plan.

A 'Self Care Maintenance Plan' refers to the activities that you have identified as important to your well-being and that you have committed to engage in on a regular basis to take care of yourself. There is no "one-size-fits-all" self-care plan, but there are some general principles that will help you manage your self-care:

1. **Take care of your physical health.**
2. **Manage your stress and reduce it where possible.**
3. **Honor your emotional and spiritual needs.**
4. **Nurture your relationships.**
5. **Find balance in your personal and work life.**

### THERE ARE SOME STRAIGHTFORWARD STEPS TO GUIDE US IN THIS PROCESS:

1. **How do you cope now?** Identify what you do now to manage stress in your life and assess if they are working for you.
2. **What would you like to do?** Complete the Self-Care Assessment Tool. What ideas did you get from the tool...what would you like to add to your routine?

3. **Outlining your plan.** Use the Self-Care Maintenance Plan Worksheet to complete what you currently do, and a preferred alternative across each domain.
4. **Obstacles to implementation.** Once you have identified these practices, it is useful to identify possible barriers or obstacles that could get in the way of implementing and/or maintaining them.
5. **Make a commitment to yourself.** Preparing a plan is important; it identifies your goals and the strategies to achieve them. However, your success in implementing your plan is ultimately based on the level of genuine commitment you make to your own self-care.
6. **Share your intentions.** Once you have developed your plan and made your commitment, share it with others.
7. **Follow your plan.** Once you have completed the assessment and worksheet you will have identified the core elements of your personal Self-Care Maintenance.
8. **Plan.** The final step is to implement your plan and keep track of how you are doing.

(Adapted from: Lisa D. Butler, PhD, based in part on materials provided by Sandra A. Lopez, LCSW, ACSW, University of Houston, Graduate School of Social Work)

### MY SELF-CARE MAINTENANCE PLAN WORKSHEET

Consider what you do now for self-care and list those activities within each dimension of self-care on this worksheet (or you can add new dimensions at the end that represent other aspects of your life). Identify new strategies that you will begin to incorporate as part of your ongoing self-care maintenance plan – pay particular attention to domains that you have not been addressing in the past.

On the last page identify barriers that might interfere with ongoing self-care, how you will address them, and any negative coping strategies you would like to target for change.

MIND	BODY
Current practice:	Current practice:
New practice:	New practice:
EMOTIONS	SPIRIT
Current practice:	Current practice:
New practice:	New practice:

WORK	RELATIONSHIPS
Current practice:	Current practice:
New practice:	New practice:
OTHER	OTHER
Current practice:	Current practice:
New practice:	New practice:



Barriers to maintaining my self-care strategies:	How I will address these barriers and remind myself to practice self-care:
Negative coping strategies I would like to use less or not at all:	What I will do instead:

## ALWAYS REMEMBER:

**Be kind and compassionate with yourself, you are doing the best you can.**

The longest relationship you will ever have is the one you have with yourself. Considering that reality, how would it serve your life, goals ambitions dreams and healing if you were kinder and more compassionate with yourself? Often it

is difficult to know what self-compassion means, what it may look like or what practices it should constitute. Broadly self-compassion includes noticing what you need for emotional support and providing that for yourself. Self-compassion practices may include, eating regularly, saying no to unreasonable requests, resting, taking exercise, talking to a trusted person, taking time to be creative, taking time off work, being in solitude, being with loving people and any other activity that helps to restore your soul, bring healing and inner calm.

Practicing self-compassion is not an act of selfishness, but in fact has positive effects on your work relationships and health. This is particularly true for your work as a human rights defender since taking time to care for yourself will have the added benefit of recharging your energy so that you are better able to serve others.

Research is showing that people who believe that everyone is doing the best that they are capable of in the moment are more likely to heal faster, forgive sooner and find peace after trauma. This involves an understanding that all people are flawed, all will make mistakes and many actions have unintended consequences. Believing that people are doing the best they can allows us to see the common humanity between us and them. Common humanity is the lens through which we can look that enables us to have compassion for ourselves and others when they (and ourselves) make serious mistakes that cause harm, damage and pain to others. It is important for your own wellbeing to understand that you are also doing the best you can in any given moment. Once you have learned new skills you will improve on the way you structure your responses and make decisions but until new skills are acquired, you are doing the best you can with the knowledge, resources and skills you currently have.

Understanding this principle will allow you to look beyond your mistakes to see that making mistakes is an inevitable part of being human. By applying this principle, you will be more equipped to treat yourself with kindness and compassion when you make errors in judgment and move through to self-forgiveness more quickly.

“Not every person has earned the right to hear your story.”  
– Dr. Bréne Brown

## CHAPTER 3

# TOOLS FOR HEALING THE SELF AND HELPING OTHERS

## 3.1 Emotional Awareness

### 1. Self-reflection

Self-reflection is the process of being able to check-in with ourselves and see what we need to be mindful/aware of. On a daily basis ask yourself the following questions.

- How am I today?
- What is happening to me?
- What do I need to be aware of?
- What will help me?
- What do I need to do?

### 2. The Body Scan

Starting in the body is often the most accessible way to describe what people are experiencing internally.

Conducting a 'body scan' with the survivor, let's call them the client or clients, involves taking each person through a slow review of the physical sensations they have in their body. These can often be traced back to subconscious emotions, but we can start to identify them by detecting them first as feelings. As a facilitator of this process for the client, your role is to encourage the client to be as specific as possible about what is going on in their bodies.

Things to note would include:

- The perceived temperature (do they feel hot or cold)
- Any tingling sensations
- Any tightness or constrictions (lump in throat or tight chest)
- Any breathing constrictions
- Headaches or discomfort in the head
- Abdominal discomfort or upset stomach
- Nausea
- Flushed face (redness)
- Tightness around the mouth
- Frowning
- Difficulty swallowing
- Dizziness or feeling or blacking out
- Any urge to run
- Crying or shouting

This activity can be done with all the members of a family, individually and in private.



## THE BODY SCAN PROCESS

**STEP 1:** Before you start, explain the process to the client and have their consent to proceed. When working with children it is advisable to have a parent or another adult present. This process is not suitable for children younger than age 8.

**STEP 2:** Place your client in a comfortable position, sitting or lying down. Take care to ensure there is privacy so you can work without interruption. If necessary, cover the client with a light blanket to help them feel safer.

**STEP 3:** Verbally, take the client through their bodies, starting at the feet and moving to the head. At each body part pause and ask them these questions, as applicable. Insert the name of the body part in the blank space.

*What is the temperature of your \_\_\_\_\_?*

*Can you describe how your \_\_\_\_\_ feels inside?*

*Do you have any tightness, tingling or odd sensations in your \_\_\_\_\_?*

*Can you feel the tips of your fingers / toes?*

As the client begins to name their physical sensations, using the diagram on the right ask them to indicate how the physical feeling makes them feel emotionally. Use the list of emotions at the end of this guidebook to help your client identify the most fitting emotion.

This activity can be done individually, in a family or a group. You can ask people to share their reflections if they are comfortable to do so.

At the end of this process, which may take approximately 20 to 30 min, you and your client will have a list of physical sensations relating to parts of their bodies and also to their emotions.

You both may be surprised by how much this powerful exercise can reveal a client's emotional state.

**STEP 4:** Thank the client for working on this process and acknowledge that it takes courage to be actively involved in one's own healing.

## 3. Feeling Person

An important part for emotional regulation is to develop the understanding of what we are feeling, how we name it and how we react to it. A useful tool for this is the feeling person exercise.

### What is needed:

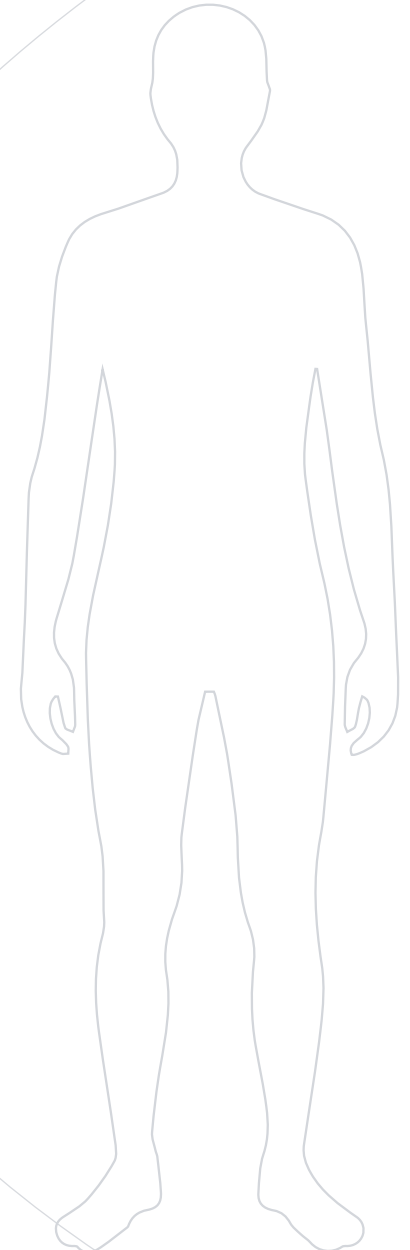
- Print out of the body outline (or can be drawn on paper if there is no printer access)
- Pen, pencil, color pencils or crayons.

### INSTRUCTIONS

Introduce the feeling person; "today we are going to try to understand how you experience different emotions and what you do to manage them. We will do this by identifying an emotion and mapping it out on your body using different colors or symbols. E.g., ... Anger can be red and symbolized by a burning fire in the chest.

## 4. Naming Emotions

This exercise encourages you to give names to the emotions that may be underlying the physical sensations. Trauma often causes people to mentally disconnect from



their bodies, meaning they don't have awareness of what is happening inside them. This exercise encourages you to reconnect with their body, which is an important part of whole-person healing.

It is useful to involve some creativity when taking them through this exercise. It is also possible to involve more descriptive terms. Some people have found that using colors, shapes and textures to describe physical sensation can be very helpful.

This activity can be done as part of the other exercises such as the feeling person or as a separate activity.

Referring back to places in the body where the client reported having a sensation, ask the following questions to help the client describe the sensation in more detail.

Questions to help the client connect to their body:

*When you feel \_\_\_\_\_ in your \_\_\_\_\_, can you describe it a bit more?*

*Does it have a color, texture, pattern or shape?*

*Does it feel like it's moving around?*

Use the emotions wheel below to help identify different emotions that may be experienced.



## 5. Talking About Emotions

List of emotions and how to talk about them:

### 1. ENJOYMENT

**People generally like to feel happy, calm, and good. You might express these feelings by smiling, laughing, or indulging yourself.**

*You might feel enjoyment when:*

- you feel close and connected to people you care about
- you feel safe and secure
- you're doing something that triggers sensory pleasure
- you're absorbed in an activity
- you feel relaxed and at peace

#### HOW TO TALK ABOUT IT

**Some words you can use to describe different kinds of enjoyment include:**

- |               |              |                |
|---------------|--------------|----------------|
| • happiness   | • amusement  | • peace        |
| • love        | • joy        | • satisfaction |
| • relief      | • pride      | • compassion   |
| • contentment | • excitement |                |

### 2. SADNESS

**Everyone feels sad from time to time. This emotion might relate to a specific event, such as a loss or rejection. But in other cases, you might have no idea why you feel sad.**

#### HOW TO TALK ABOUT IT

**When you're sad, you might describe yourself as feeling:**

- |                |            |             |
|----------------|------------|-------------|
| • lonely       | • hopeless | • troubled  |
| • heartbroken  | • grieved  | • resigned  |
| • gloomy       | • unhappy  | • miserable |
| • disappointed | • lost     |             |



**Mourn.** Mourning is a normal part of [grief](#). Whether you're trying to recover from a loss, [breakup](#), change, or failure to achieve a goal, acknowledging your loss can help you accept and work through it. Everyone grieves in their own way, so do what feels right to you. It might help to talk about the pain you're in, but it also might help to simply sit with your feelings for a while or express them creatively.

**Do something meaningful.** Doing something to help others or give back to society can help you feel more connected to other people. If you've recently lost someone you cared about, consider finishing a project they cared about or donating your time to a cause they supported.

**Reach out for support.** This is easier said than done when you're in a low point. Try to remember the people in your life who care for you and likely want to help you. The pain of heartache does ease in time, even if you can't imagine that at the moment.

If your sadness lingers or begins to have a significant impact on daily life and makes it hard to work, go to school, or maintain your relationships, it may help to talk to a [therapist](#).

### 3. FEAR

**Fear happens when you sense any type of threat. Depending on that perceived threat, fear can range from mild to severe.**

Keep in mind that the level of fear you feel doesn't always match up with the intensity of the threat. For example, if you live with anxiety, you might feel fear around situations that don't actually pose much of a threat – though that doesn't make the fear any less real.

#### HOW TO TALK ABOUT IT

**Fear can make you feel:**

- worried
- terrified
- confused
- doubtful
- panicked
- stressed
- nervous
- horrified
- anxious
- desperate

Fear is a totally normal emotion – and one that likely kept your ancestors from being eaten alive – but there are things you can do to combat it:

**Confront fear instead of avoiding it.** If you're afraid of something, whether it's a serious discussion, meeting new people, or driving, it's natural to want to stay away from the source of your fear. But this can often just make your fear worse. Instead, try to face your fear safely. For example, if you suddenly develop a fear of driving, get back into your car and drive again right away. Stick close to home at first if it helps, but don't avoid it.

**Distract yourself from your fear.** Sometimes fear can become so overwhelming that it's hard to think about anything else. But [ruminating](#), or letting the same thoughts play out over and over again, can have a negative impact on your emotional state. It can also make fear worse. If you feel yourself fixating on a worry or source of stress, try something distracting. Listen to an audio book or podcast, cook with a new recipe you have to concentrate on, or go for a walk or jog with some energizing music.

**Consider the fear logically.** Take a moment to think about your fear. Is there anything you can do about it? Can it actually harm you? What's the worst thing that could happen if your fear came true? What would you do in that scenario? Knowing how you would deal with your fear can help you feel less afraid.

Don't get discouraged if these tips seem impossible or overwhelming – they can be hard to accomplish on your own. Consider working with a therapist, who can help you navigate [panic attacks](#), phobias, anxiety, and other mental health issues around fear.

## 4. ANGER

**Anger** usually happens when you experience some type of injustice. This experience can make you feel threatened, trapped, and unable to defend yourself. Many people think of anger as a negative thing, but it's a normal emotion that can help you know when a situation has become toxic.

### HOW TO TALK ABOUT IT

**Words you might use when you feel angry include:**

- annoyed
- frustrated
- peeved
- contrary
- bitter
- infuriated
- irritated
- mad
- cheated
- vengeful
- insulted

The next time you find yourself in a huff, try these tips for managing anger in a more productive way:

**Take a break.** When you feel frustrated, putting some distance between yourself and the situation upsetting you can help you avoid in-the-moment reactions or angry outbursts. Try taking a walk or listening to a calming song. While away, take a few minutes to consider what's causing your anger. Does the situation have another perspective? Can you do anything to make it better?

**Express your anger constructively.** You might avoid talking about your anger to help prevent conflict. **Internalizing** can seem like a safe strategy, but your anger can fester, and you may end up nursing a grudge. This can affect your interpersonal relationships as well as your emotional well-being. Instead, take time to cool off if you need it, then try expressing your feelings calmly and respectfully.

**Get to the bottom of the cause:** Anger is usually an expression of an underlying painful emotion. Often it is associated with being betrayed, hurt, deceived or self-judgment. When anger arises it's good to try and understand what the underlying emotion is and to deal with that as well as managing the anger itself.

## 5. DISGUST

You typically experience disgust as a reaction to unpleasant or unwanted situations. Like anger, feelings of disgust can help to protect from things you want to avoid.

It can also pose problems if it leads you to dislike certain people, including **yourself**, or situations that aren't necessarily bad for you.

### HOW TO TALK ABOUT IT

**Disgust might cause you to feel:**

- dislike
- revulsion
- loathing
- disapproving
- offended
- horrified
- uncomfortable
- nauseated
- disturbed
- withdrawal
- aversion

Disgust can happen as a natural response to something you dislike. In some situations, you might want to work through or overcome your disgust. These strategies can help:

**Practice compassion.** It's common to feel uncomfortable when facing things you fear or don't understand. Many people dislike being around sick people, for example. If you feel disturbed when thinking about sick people, try spending some time with an unwell friend or loved one or offering to help them out. It's important to take steps to protect your own health, so make sure they aren't contagious first.

**Focus on the behavior, not the person.** If someone you care for does something that offends or disgusts you, you may disapprove and react by withdrawing, pushing them away, or getting angry. But instead, you might try talking to that person. For example, if your sister smokes, avoid coughing loudly or making pointed comments about the smell of stale tobacco. Instead, tell her that cigarette smoke makes you feel sick and that you're concerned for her health. Offer to help her **quit** or work with her on finding support.

**Expose yourself slowly.** Some things may just turn your stomach no

matter what. Maybe you can't stand any type of creepy-crawly creature but wish you could try gardening. To combat disgust over how worms look, you might start by reading about them and looking at pictures of them. If you worry about them getting on your hands, you could try wearing gardening gloves. If you don't like watching them move, you could try watching short video clips about worms to get used to them before seeing them in real life.

If you feel strong dislike toward a group of people, a specific person, or toward yourself, consider talking to a therapist about your feelings (noticing a theme here?).

Even if you aren't sure exactly what's behind your disgust, they can help you work through the emotion and explore positive ways of coping with it.

## 3.2 Self-regulation Skills

### 1. Mindfulness

Mindfulness is about being fully present in the world around us, being aware of where we are, what we are doing and how we are reacting to what is going on around us. Most of the tools in this section help promote mindfulness.

### 2. Grounding

Grounding is a self-regulation skill that helps us reconnect with our bodies and the world around us. A useful grounding technique is using our 5 senses.

### 3. Breathing

#### ANXIETY GROUNDING TECHNIQUE

Focus on your breathing, then identify:



Breathing techniques are aimed at helping you pay attention to and slow down your breathing. The physiological benefits of this are that it helps calm the body by slowing the heart rate and getting more oxygen around the body. This is particularly useful if anxious or the physiological responses of trauma are triggered. An example of a breathing exercise is box breathing.

#### SIT COMFORTABLY IF YOU CAN AND IMAGINE A BOX.

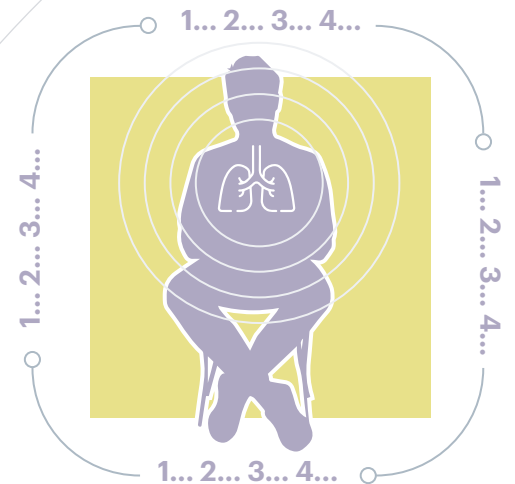
**STEP 1: Breathe** in counting to four slowly. Feel the air enter your lungs.

**STEP 2: Hold** your breath for 4 seconds. Try to avoid inhaling or exhaling for 4 seconds.

**STEP 3:** Slowly **exhale** through your mouth for 4 seconds.

**STEP 4: Repeat** steps 1 to 3 until you feel re-centred.

Repeat this exercise as many times as you can. 30 seconds of deep breathing will help you feel more relaxed and in control.



### 4. Meditation

The script below is taken from FOCUS Family Resiliency training manual, 2015.

*Ask the group to close their eyes, if they feel comfortable doing so, and take a couple of deep breaths. Breathing is from the diaphragm or stomach and not the shoulders. Imagine that there is a balloon in your stomach (can put hands on stomach if it helps) that inflates when you breathe in and deflates when you breathe out.*

Now just relax, (feel where in your body you feel tense and release this tension), let yourself go and just keep on breathing in and out slowly. 1, 2, 3.

Now I want you guys to breathe in and let the air fill your stomach 1, 2, 3. And now breathe all the air out 1, 2, 3.

Think about a place that makes you feel comfortable, calm and relax. This can be a beach, a field, a rain forest, a room in your house, your favourite get away place. Think about whatever place helps you feel comfortable, calm and relaxed.

Continue to breathe in 1, 2, 3 and out 1, 2, 3

Think about the place that makes you feel comfortable, calm and relaxed.

Imagine you are at that place now, it is just you nobody else, this is your place where you can feel comfortable, calm and relaxed. Imagine how the place looks like. Is it sunny? What colors do you see? As you imagine yourself in this special place, pay attention to every little detail there, smells, sounds. What objects are around you? Is there water? Are there trees? Is there grass? Or Sand? Can you see the sky, what color is the sky?

Now I want you to focus on the sounds. Can you hear any wind? Do you hear the water? Think about the sounds? Do you hear any birds? Do you hear the trees? How does the ground sound like when you walk?

Now think about how it smells? What are the different scents that is going into your nose? Breathe in deeply 1, 2, 3, 4, 5 and breathe out 1, 2, 3, 4, 5. Focus on those smells

Next focus on how it feels to be there. How does your skin feel? How do your feet feel walking around your special place? Do you feel warm? Or Cool? How do your eyes feel? Do you feel calm relaxed and comfortable?

Take a few more moment and savour how it feels to be here. Think about the sight, sounds, smells, and sensations in your body when you are there

Now bring your awareness back to your breathing

Focus on your breathing

Bring your awareness back into the room

When you are ready, open your eyes.

### 3.3 Coping Mechanisms

#### 1. What Are My Coping Mechanisms?



Draw lines indicating the things that you tend to do when you are experiencing the feelings listed in the inner circle.

Use the following guidelines for the number of lines that link the centre circle with the outside ones:

- 1 line = never**
- 2 lines = once in a while**
- 3 lines = sometimes**
- 4 lines = often**
- 5 lines = always**



## 2. Accessing Support



Draw lines indicating the places that you tend to go when you are experiencing the feelings listed in the inner circle.

Use the following guidelines for the number of lines that link the inner circle with the outside ones:

- 1 line = never**
- 2 lines = once in a while**
- 3 lines = sometimes**
- 4 lines = often**
- 5 lines = always**

## 3. STOPP

<b>S</b> <b>TOP</b>	<b>T</b> <b>AKE A</b> <b>BREATH</b>	<b>O</b> <b>BERVE</b>	<b>P</b> <b>ULL BACK</b> <b>PUT IN SOME</b> <b>PERSPECTIVE</b>	<b>P</b> <b>RACTICE</b> <b>WHAT</b> <b>WORKS –</b> <b>PROCEED</b>
Stop and step back from the situation, in your mind	Breathe slowly once or twice	<p>Ask yourself:</p> <p>What's happening?</p> <p>What am I reacting to?</p> <p>What am I thinking – what are the words that my mind is saying?</p> <p>What emotions am I feeling?</p> <p>What physical sensations do I notice in my body?</p> <p>Where is my focus of attention?</p>	<p>See the situation as an outside observer.</p> <p>Ask yourself:</p> <p>What's the bigger picture?</p> <p>What is another way of looking at this situation?</p> <p>What would someone else see and make of it?</p> <p>What might a trusted friend say to me right now?</p> <p>How important is this right now?</p> <p>How important will it be in 6 months?</p> <p>Is my reaction in proportion to the actual event?</p> <p>What consequences might my reaction have?</p>	<p>Ask yourself:</p> <p>What can I do that will be in line with my values and principles?</p> <p>What can I do that will get me the outcome/ result that I desire?</p> <p>What is the best thing to do, for me, for others, for the situation?</p> <p><b>Choose your response!</b></p>

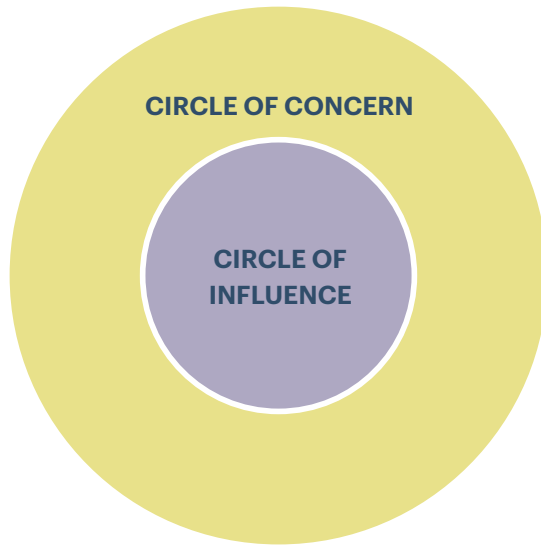
Adapted from [www.getselfhelp.co.uk](http://www.getselfhelp.co.uk)

## 4. Circle of Concern/ Circle of Influence

*Adapted from Franklin Covey 7 Habits of Highly Effective People*

Your **CIRCLE OF INFLUENCE** includes those things you can affect directly.

Your **CIRCLE OF CONCERN** includes all those things you care about but have no direct control over



### PROACTIVE FOCUS

When people focus on things they can influence, they expand their knowledge and experience, and they build trustworthiness. As a result, their Circle of Influence grows.

### REACTIVE FOCUS

When people focus on things they cannot control, they have less time and energy to spend on things they can influence. Consequently, their Circle of Influence shrinks.

### CIRCLE OF INFLUENCE ACTIVITY

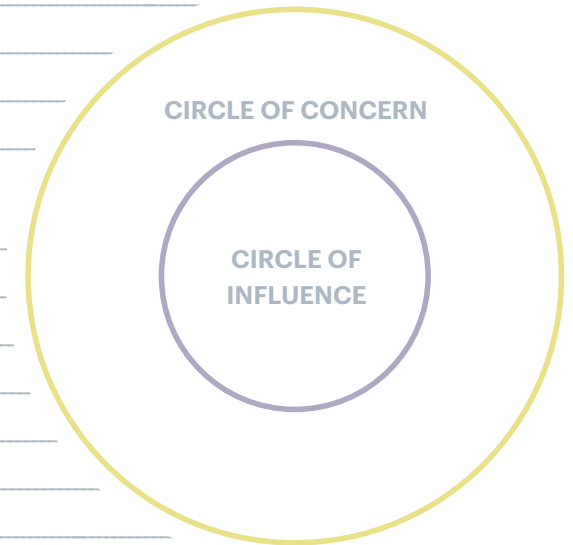
1. Thinking about one of the challenges you identified with regard to working effectively as a team (one of your pink post-it notes):
2. What are the things, related to this challenge, that are within your circle of concern?

**CIRCLE OF CONCERN:** \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**CIRCLE OF INFLUENCE:** \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_



3. What are the things, related to this challenge, that are within your circle of influence (the things that you have some influence over)? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

4. Identify 3 actions (that are in your Circle of Influence) that you will take over the next 6 weeks to change or overcome this challenge: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

## 5. Problem Solving Skills

The circle of concern/circle of influence is a useful activity to help solve problems. Many times, when we think of a problem or challenge finding a solution can be too overwhelming. Alternatively, we think about the final endpoint without thinking about the different steps that need to be taken along the way. So, if you, or someone you are working with is facing a challenge you can use this ladder exercise to help.

At the bottom of the ladder, you put what the problem is, or where you are now.

At the top of the ladder, you put what the solution may be, or where you want to get to.

Then you use each step of the ladder to identify what things need to happen to get to the top of the ladder.

### 3.4 Communication Skills

#### 1. Psychoeducation

When working with trauma one of the greatest challenges is the lack of understanding about how this can impact one's thoughts, feelings and behavior. This is something that can apply to you and the people that you work with. Throughout the guidebook the impacts have been shown, by showing this, you may now have a better understanding. If you have been traumatized, knowing what some of the impacts are can help you understand the changes you have experienced. Therefore, explaining these reactions to others and helping them understand too is incredibly helpful. This is what we call psychoeducation, where we educate others about their psychology and why they may be experiencing what they are. This also helps to normalise the responses, as many people can feel that there is something wrong with them because of the changes they have experienced.

## 2. Creating a Safe Space

### The Setting for a Family Discussion

**STEP 1:** Invite willing members of the family to share their perspective of the traumatic event, you can use the different tools to help them discover this.

**STEP 2:** Establish a time and place to meet. The family home may be suitable

**STEP 3:** At the meeting venue, seat everyone comfortably in a circle.

**STEP 4:** The facilitator thanks the family for attending and starts the conversation by inviting members to speak and share.

The facilitator should take care not to offer diagnoses, force any topic or force any members to engage. The facilitator's role is to support and encourage participation by creating a safe and non-judgemental space.

Just a single-family discussion can be very effective to dissolve communication barriers within the home. Often family members may feel isolated in their experience, so bringing them together and helping them share can also help them to reconnect.

Psychosocial support workers who employ this family-based technique are encouraged to belong to a network of other psychosocial professionals and to refer clients for further help if necessary.

## 3. Learning the Language

### The Language of Experience (or Trauma Informed Communication)

In order to effectively help traumatized families, it is useful to teach them the language of their experience. This is different from daily, ordinary language. The language of trauma serves the following benefits:

- It allows people to verbally describe their experiences including thoughts, feelings and emotions
- It gives people the tools to observe and reflect on the way they think about their traumatic experience

- It empowers people with greater awareness to notice the way in which they relate to the world around them
- They learn to recognize that their responses to the trauma are normal responses to abnormal circumstances
- Families learn to communicate more effectively and more openly
- Children and younger family members have a way of being heard
- Those with difficulty expressing emotions will learn to recognize and name them

## Principles of Teaching the Language of Trauma

### Approach the process with compassion, patience and non-judgment

When learning a new way of communication, the student can be overwhelmed by the process. This is made more difficult when the student in question is someone trying to recover from trauma.

The presence of trauma, which is known to be an obstacle to learning, requires that the entire process is handled gently and with patience and compassion. It is also helpful to allow the trauma survivor, who is also the student, to lead the process by determining the pace at which learning takes place. Learning to speak and understand the language of trauma is a life-skill which will assist with healthy recovery for possible future challenges.

### Meet the words within their cultural context.

Cultures and languages have different phrases for different feelings or experiences. Some terms in the language of trauma, may not have a translatable equivalent in the language of the trauma survivor. Allow the survivor to lead the process of identifying the word that most meets the necessary description.

### Start with the simplest form of the word

Any new way of communicating takes time to learn. It helps when the learning process starts with the simplest and moves towards the more complex.

## 3.5 Making Referrals

Six weeks is generally regarded as the critical time needed for trauma recovery. Referral is necessary if it seems that after this time:

- The person's trauma related symptoms become worse or get stronger, rather than decrease.
- The person experiences ongoing tension, bewilderment, confusion, tension, emptiness and exhaustion.
- The trauma is impacting on the person's other social/basic needs such as their ability to work; access healthcare and education; provide food and shelter for themselves and their dependents etc.

### When to Refer

While every organization wants to be able to meet all the needs of individuals and communities the reality is that most can't. Furthermore, in the aftermath of violence and in the trauma healing process the needs of individuals and communities can vary. Therefore, in taking a holistic approach we need to consider what all the needs of those we work with may be, this can range from mental health support to medical needs, to livelihood support or food support. So, we refer when we can identify that this is the need of an individual but that we as an organization cannot provide the service. In addition, we also refer in these very important situations:

#### REFER WHEN...

- The person is: unable to control their feelings of anger and/or depression; exhibiting destructive behavior towards others and/or himself or herself; continues to be withdrawn and apathetic; or becomes suicidal.
- The person behaves in sexually inappropriate ways – decreased interest in sexual activity can be expected immediately after trauma.
- Any psychotic symptoms emerge – such as hearing voices, seeing things, feeling afraid of unreal things.



- The person continues to complain of body pains and injury that do not seem to appear any better.
- Since the event, the person smokes, drinks or takes drugs in excess.
- The person's work performance deteriorates, or she/he is unable to cope with the ordinary demands of daily living.
- The person's relationships suffer badly, or sexual problems emerge.
- There is a re-emergence of previous psychiatric or psychological problems.

## How to Refer

The first step of the referral process is to do referral mapping in the community that you are working in. This can begin by looking on the internet, but often the most up to date information isn't available, so you may need to use your existing work networks to find out about other organizations. The World Health Organization (WHO) recommends the use of the **4 W's** approach to mapping for MHPSS. This is, **Who** is the service provider? **Where** are they situated/located? **When** can they be accessed? **What** do they offer?

Next, it's best to try and arrange a meeting with the organization. Referral processes are often more effective if the other organization knows about you, and you have a working relationship where they can refer to you as well. The contact details of the referral site and key contact personnel within that referral site should be captured in your referral mapping so that everyone in the organization has access to the necessary information.

Referrals can be made informally by just informing the client where they should go, while other organizations may require more formal referral pathways such as sending the individual with a referral letter. Get permission from the participant. She/he should be informed of the referral and what is hoped to be achieved through the referral. Referral information should include:

- Client's name
- Address
- Contact phone numbers
- Age/date of birth
- Date of interview with you
- A very brief description of the nature of the client's problems. The amount of information that you include depends on what the referral is for and to whom you are referring. Always check with the client what information they are comfortable including in the referral letter
- Name and contact number of the fieldworker/counselor/psychosocial support etc.

The referral process is a professional one, designed to further assist the client. Confidentiality should never be broken by passing on more information than is strictly necessary.

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## NOTES



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